

MoPac 1 Aesthetics Advisory Committee Summary

September 2007



AAC Intentions and Message to TxDOT and the Design Team

The Loop 1 Corridor Aesthetics Advisory Committee (AAC) thanks the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for the opportunity to serve in an advisory capacity to the *MoPac 1* project team. We recognize that TxDOT will consider this input when deciding what actions or recommendations to implement.

Our message to the design team is to recognize the nature of this roadway as something that is unique to Austin and a corridor that we would like to promote as distinct to Austin as it is improved. We hope that TxDOT and each of the design team members consider these values to the community when making design decisions. The committee wants the traveling public to experience a unique and beautiful corridor that is memorable and reflective of its surrounding context.

The Aesthetics Advisory Committee for the Loop 1 Corridor Project identifies the following summary report as priorities and preferences for the aesthetic elements of the project. This committee recognizes the potential for funding, site constraints and maintenance could affect the final outcome of these recommendations.

Frances B Allen

Sam Haddad

Steve Sadomsky

Adam Lee Cox

Ulrich May

Maria Bucher

Kay Smith

Mark Z. Fisher

Krista M. Saeger

J. Robinson

Kevin Abner
Pruitt

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AAC Summary Efforts

The *MoPac 1* Aesthetics Advisory Committee (AAC) met over the course of six months during the spring and summer of 2007. The committee reviewed the aesthetic aspects of various elements of the Loop 1 project such as noise barriers, retaining walls, landscaping, specialty lighting, and sign structures.

The committee consisted of community member: Frances B. Allen, Matt Bucher, Linda Godinez, Sam Haddad, Larry Halford, Kay Newell, Fred Robinson, Krista Saeger, Ross Robinson (Austin State School), Adrienne Vaughan Campbell (Texas Historical Commission, THC), Steve Sadowsky (City of Austin), Mark Herber (Texas Department of Transportation [TxDOT] project manager), and Kerry Blackmon (TxDOT Austin District Landscape Architect).

The committee was chaired by John Kelly, project manager for the *MoPac 1* consulting team. Catherine Judd, a landscape architect with the consulting team, provided the AAC with professional support and coordinated meetings.

Community priorities and values were assessed at the first meeting which established a foundation for basing the focus of each committee meeting topic. Meetings were dynamic and included group discussions and participation. Independent and group exercises, PowerPoint presentations, exhibits, handouts, surveys, and brainstorming all fostered the AAC process. Group communication was maintained between the AAC meetings through electronic mail correspondence. During the course of the AAC process, a presentation was made at the June 17th MoPac Neighborhood Associations Coalition (MoNAC) meeting to inform the various neighborhood associations of the AAC efforts and schedule.

AAC members were encouraged to share the materials presented at the meetings with community members and to solicit feedback to involve the broader community in the AAC efforts. AAC members shared images and conducted independent research on potential aesthetic elements and examples they found from Texas and throughout the United States.

The result of these efforts is the following summary report on the recommendations and aesthetic preferences of the AAC complemented by photographs and sketches that illustrate the various concepts.

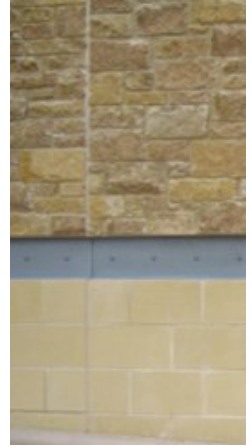
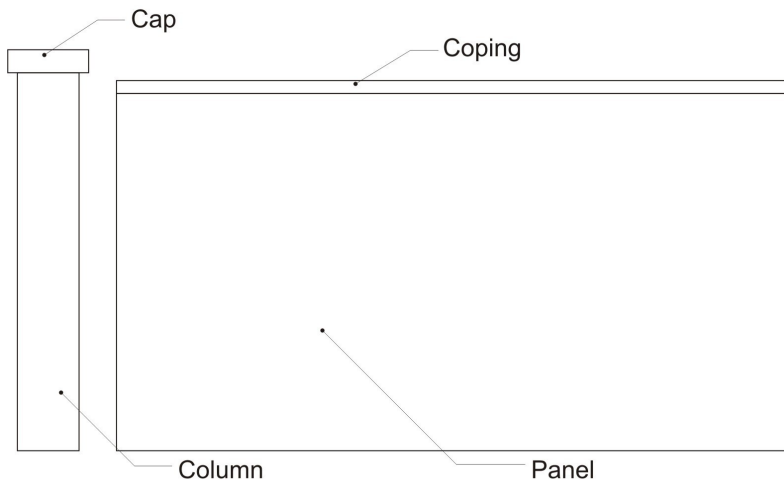
This summary is intended to be a resource document for the multi-disciplinary design team as the project progresses through design and construction. The TxDOT project manager and the engineering consulting project manager will maintain a copy of the Master AAC Notebook for reference in the future efforts of the *MoPac 1* project. The committee members may be conferred with for input in the future to review proposed aesthetic treatments, to gather input as site specific design issues arise, or as new aesthetic opportunities emerge.

This has been a pioneering effort for both the community and TxDOT which ascribes to set an example of how the engagement and open communication between the state and the public can create projects that are both safe and functional as well as meaningful and attractive to the community.

Community Priorities

The AAC's noise barrier priorities are:

- that they should consist of field sections, flanked by columns; columns should include a cap, and there should be a coping at the top of the wall,
- to comply with Texas Historical Commission (THC) tenets, noise barriers should neither detract from nor visually intrude on an adjacent historic neighborhood (THC is concerned with the residential side of the wall and suggests simple, uncomplicated designs with a limited amount of textures to avoid a determination of adverse effect to the historic districts),
- that there should be multiple textures on the wall to break up monotony and height of wall with the potential for adding banding with color-contrasting bands or patterns,
- that the overall style of the walls should be traditional and classic without modern or contemporary styling,
- that the columns should have a fluted pattern as influenced by architectural icons such as the State Capital and Pease Mansion,



Community Priorities

The AAC's noise barrier priorities are (continued):

- that subdued color tones and earth tones (buff, tan, and limestone) are preferred with some accents like native granite as seen on the State Capitol,



- that the materials used should include brick (in the color family of the historic “Austin Common Brick”), stone in the color and pattern of limestone (including cut block), a textured finish (ashlar look), or a board and batten pattern,



- that the overall composition should include a lighter color applied to the accent components (i.e., the column, cap, coping and safety barrier, where present), and a darker field would complement these on the face of the wall above the crash barrier (when present),



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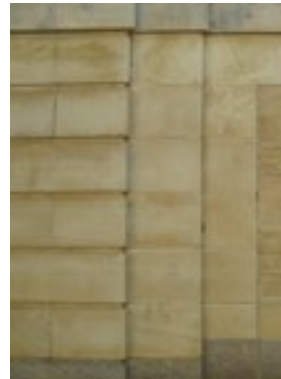
Community Priorities

The AAC's noise barrier priorities are (continued):

- that graffiti should be discouraged with texturing on lower portions of the wall (excluding any safety barriers) and the application of graffiti resistant coatings in publicly accessible areas,
- that the symbology or imagery for formliners could be applied to walls surface and they should reflect an Austin style with native vegetation like an oak leaf or animals like a deer, longhorn, or hawk, and



- that the overall conceptual design should draw influence from Austin landmarks like the State Capitol, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Pease Mansion.



Community Priorities

The AAC's general landscaping priorities are:

- to seek a “parkway” that will include as much vegetation as possible, and
- to increase the density of vegetation and landscaping in the corridor with natural and native palette, but recognizing the north/south orientation of the corridor may require some specialized species for site specific conditions.



The AAC's landscaping priorities north of RM 2222 where the right-of-way (ROW) is wider is to protect and increase the type of vegetation present by:

- utilizing a naturalistic and organic layout,
- adding trees to existing mature tree clusters and more wildflowers in the grassy areas,
- using suggested flower species that include cosmos, coreopsis, asters, and poppies,



Community Priorities

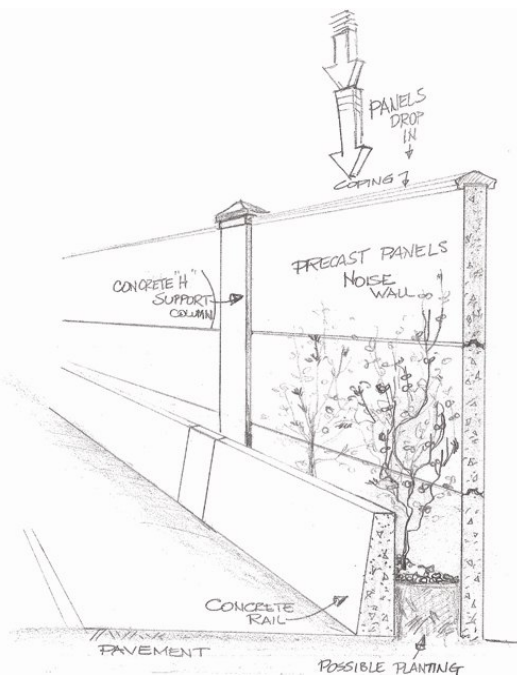
The AAC's general landscaping priorities are (continued):

- integrating evergreen tree species where noise barriers would not be directly blocking views from residences to the roadway (i.e. 35th Street northbound exit ramp) or the Austin Memorial Park Cemetery, and
- including flowering tree species like redbud and mountain laurel.



The AAC's landscaping priorities south of RM 2222 where the ROW is very constrained are:

- to incorporate vines along the noise barriers where possible (including the suggested crossvine and honeysuckle),
- to include opportunities for plantings or vines where possible (one option could be to create a space between the safety barrier (where present) and the noise barrier to allow vegetation to be planted),



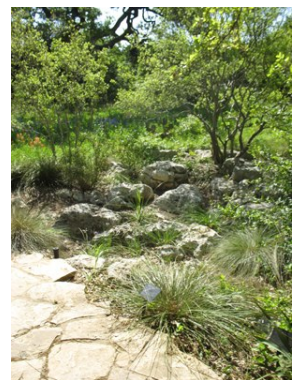
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Community Priorities

The AAC's general landscaping priorities are (continued):

The AAC's landscaping priorities south of RM 2222 where the ROW is very constrained are (continued):

- applying more formalized landscaping design in residential areas to complement the surrounding context,
- to use a broader plant palette at high visibility nodes with a combination of shrubs, ground covers, and trees,
- to use a lush, soft, arching, sweeping and generally unstructured plant form in contrast with spiky, pointy, or succulent form--however these plants are not discouraged as accent elements,
- to explore partnerships with neighborhood organizations to assist with maintenance or seasonal color plantings with safety considerations being made for locations inside the ROW,



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Community Priorities

The AAC's general landscaping priorities are (continued):

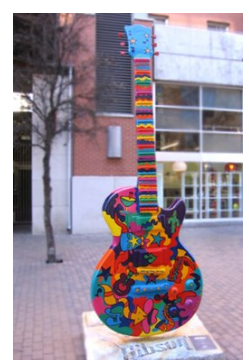
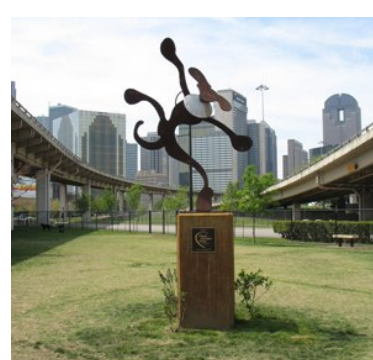
- to promote native plantings with low water requirements as recommended in the City of Austin's Grow Green Native and Adapted Plant Guide,



- to consider the Cesar Chavez Street and US 183 interchanges as low priorities because they currently include a large amount of mature vegetation that will be minimally impacted by the proposed project, and



- to consider areas where there is available space in the ROW and safety permits (i.e. near the Historic Clarksville neighborhood) for a public art space.

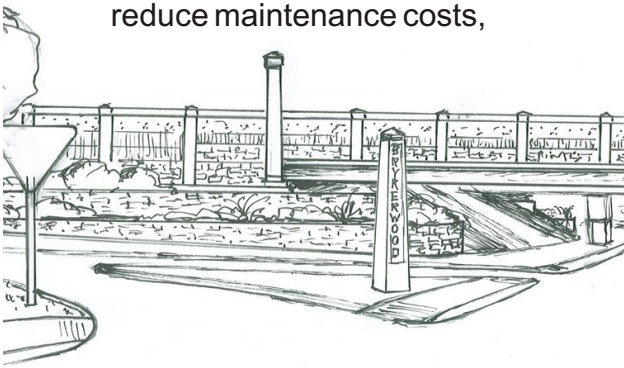


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Community Priorities

The AAC's additional priorities are:

- to provide neighborhood identification or distinction through design or signage (nodal architectural features like vertical elements or a change in materials could represent a neighborhood or intersection),
- to focus enhancements at intersections or nodes for impact and to stretch construction dollars and reduce maintenance costs,



PEMBERTON HEIGHTS



- to use an art panel when it is inappropriate to plant vegetation (i.e., vines could be applied to the wall in a material like copper or resembling copper which would patina to a green color and could enhance a wall and complement areas where viney is feasible),
- to treat existing infrastructure elements by cleaning and opaque sealing them to complement the treatments applied elsewhere on the project, and
- where the opportunity arises to enhance existing infrastructure by cleaning and opaque sealing it to complement the other aesthetic elements the color should either have a low contrast base and trim or a darker base with lighter trim. An example from College Station (far left) was appealing to the AAC.



Community Priorities

- The AAC recommends utilizing the TxDOT standard large guide sign truss designs because they have a low profile and are not distracting or substantial (i.e. it's not solid). However, the AAC came up with a recommendation that the galvanized steel be substituted with weathering steel if possible, also noting that it could be worthwhile to consider the same weathering steel for metal beam guard fence.



- The AAC has prioritized specialty lighting in the following rank: three (3) people preferring to focus on pedestrian lighting, two (2) people preferring to focus on infrastructure lighting, two (2) people preferring to focus on signage/illumination and one (1) person preferring to focus on landscape lighting.

